



# Re-defining School Counseling

*A profession that focuses on the relations and interactions between students and their school with the express purpose of reducing the effects of environmental and institutional barriers that impede student academic success.*

*The Education Trust*

Standards-based school reform dictates that all children have equal access to quality teaching and a rich curriculum. Closing the achievement gap between poor students and students of color and their more advantaged peers is the new mission of schools today. School counselors need to be integral players in closing this gap by helping students gain access to rigorous academic preparation and supporting teachers to make sure that all students succeed. Connecting the school counseling program and the work of counselors to the new mission of schools places school counselors front and center in promoting access and equity for all students. In this approach, school counselors are proactive leaders who are effective collaborators in advocating for the success of all students.

## Connecting School Counseling to Standards





## MYTHS

### Prevailing Beliefs That Influence What Counselors Know & Do

#### **Myth 1: All students don't need to be prepared for college.**

When counselors let this belief influence their work with students, teachers, and parents, options and opportunities are limited for large numbers of students from low-income families and students of color.

#### **Myth 2: Schools can't overcome the effects of poverty and race on achievement.**

When educators, counselors, and policy makers believe "these kids can't succeed," schools expect less from "these students," set low performance standards and provide watered down curriculum.

#### **Myth 3: Students choose what courses they take; counselors don't decide for them.**

When counselors don't believe that they should challenge students to enroll in more rigorous courses, or provide the necessary information for selected career paths, many students are not prepared for higher education and high level employment.

#### **Myth 4: Counselors should work primarily with individuals to address personal and social problems.**

When counselors believe their primary role is to work with individuals' personal problems, they often work in isolation and their work is seen as peripheral to the academic purpose of schools.

#### **Myth 5: Low-income parents and parents of color don't participate in their children's education.**

When teachers, counselors and administrators are influenced by these beliefs they sell the students short.

## FACTS

### Challenging Beliefs

#### **Fact 1: Increasing numbers of students are enrolling in college.**

Currently, 75% of **all** high school graduates enroll in postsecondary education within two years and even more enter later. Students know that some postsecondary education increases employment opportunities.

#### **Fact 2: Students in many schools serving high numbers of students of color and poor students are achieving at high levels.**

*Dispelling the Myth*, a 2002 Education Trust publication, identified 4,577 high minority and/or high poverty schools throughout the nation where students' reading and/or math performance was in the top third among all schools in the state at the same grade level.

#### **Fact 3: Student placement in courses is determined by early decisions.**

Data indicate that student placement in courses is determined by early tracking, sorting and selecting of students into prerequisite courses. Frequently, students don't have the information and knowledge necessary to make appropriate course selection.

#### **Fact 4: Counselors must be part of the team of educators whose purpose is to provide rigorous academic preparation for all students.**

According to current literature, school counselors who are a part of the leadership team of the school can influence policies and practices that directly affect student success.

#### **Fact 5: Low-income parents and parents of color are equally interested in their children's education.**

Survey after survey show shows that low-income parents and parents of color have high aspirations for their children. These students succeed when schools work with parents to translate aspirations into action.





# Counselors Taking Action\*

## Problem 1:

The district is implementing a new promotion policy which will retain students in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade who do not meet proficient reading and math levels. Teachers are concerned because they are being held accountable for students who are way behind. Parents are angry because they feel students are being penalized because of the school's shortcomings. The principals and administration know that students who are not able to read for learning by the end of 3rd grade may be in academic jeopardy for their entire school careers so they support the policy.

## Counselor Action 1

The counselor uses the school review committee to show data on schools with populations just like theirs where students are reading on grade level and leads a discussion about why these schools are successful. The counselor uses problem solving skills to help teachers develop a plan to address the reading problem, including visiting some successful schools.

The counselor works with community groups to educate parents about why the policy is being put in place, what assessments will be used and shows them the data on schools like theirs where students are reading on grade level. Organized by the counselor, the group plans to begin support activities such as community read-ins, tutoring, and Saturday classes to help students catch up.

## Problem 2

The school board recently adopted a policy that all students would enroll in 9th grade Algebra. This required several additional classes.

When reviewing achievement data, the counselor noticed a consistent pattern of failure in one teacher's 9th grade Algebra class. Students and parents complained about the number of students failing this teacher's class.

## Counselor Action 2

The counselor observes the class, talks with the teacher and learns that this teacher was previously teaching advanced math classes and moved this year to a 9th grade Algebra class. After some discussion, the teacher acknowledges that he was unfamiliar with strategies to teach beginning Algebra students. Then, the counselor reviews the performance data for all 9th grade Algebra classes, notices that some teachers were extremely successful. However, failure rates overall were too high. The counselor then talks with the principal about the need for professional development for all math teachers to reduce the failure rates, and the need for instituting support systems for students. The counselor then secures help for the students who were failing by forming study groups and arranging for tutoring and makes arrangements for the struggling teacher to learn from his colleagues.

\*Examples of practicing school counselors working to make systemic change.





“  
*We are the leaders we have been waiting for.*”

*-Mahatma Gandhi*

School counselors can help close the achievement gap between poor students, students of color and their more affluent peers throughout the K-12 system and improve achievement for all students. They can do this by implementing a new vision for their work.

**Leadership** – Connecting the counseling program to the academic mission of schools and challenging the status quo. Forming relationships with students and adults in the school and community to support all students’ academic success.

**Advocacy** – Advocating to remove systemic barriers that prevent all students from succeeding. Advocating for policies and practices that promote academic success for all students.

**Teaming and Collaboration** - Using counseling skills with all stakeholders to mobilize human and financial resources to support high standards for all students.

**Counseling** – Using counseling skills to assist students in overcoming social, personal, and academic barriers. Brokering community resources to support students.

**Assessment and Use of Data** – Using a wide range of data to assess student needs, establish measurable goals, and measure the results of initiatives designed to improve students’ academic success. Using data is a proven way of insuring accountability for school counseling programs.

“  
*Results are not about what counselors do.*

*Results are about what students do.*”

*- C.D. Johnson*





*“In order to begin to meet the needs of today’s students, school counselors must look at individual problems from a systemic perspective. It is no longer enough to focus only on helping students. We must also work to change the system.”*

*–Peggy Hines*



The Education Trust works for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels—pre-kindergarten through college. While we know that all schools and colleges could better serve their students, our work focuses on those serving low-income youth and students of color.

The National School Counselor Training Initiative provides professional development for practicing school counselors. For more information about this training initiative contact:

**The Education Trust**

Reese House • [rhouse@edtrust.org](mailto:rhouse@edtrust.org)  
Stephanie Robinson • [srobinson@edtrust.org](mailto:srobinson@edtrust.org)  
1725 K Street, NW  
Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20006

[www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org)

*This brochure is made possible by funding from*

## **MetLife Foundation**

MetLife Foundation, established in 1976 by MetLife, supports health, education, civic and cultural programs throughout the United States. For more information about the Foundation, please visit the website at [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).





# Challenging the Myths:

Rethinking the Role of  
School Counselors

The Education Trust &  
MetLife Foundation  
National School Counselor  
Training Initiative

*“There are new demands  
on schools to educate  
all students to proficient  
levels. This requires all  
of the adult members of  
the school community,  
including counselors, to be  
responsible for students’  
academic success.”*

-Stephanie Robinson

